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ABSTRACT

A Piagetian, language-experience approach to the early teaching of reading to normal young and older developmentally delayed preoperational children was developed. The approach was discussed in a specially-developed manual which was field tested by 42 teachers among 390 children in 16 school systems in several states and in Canada. Subjects were preponderantly residents of suburban communities in the United States, white or black, 3 to 5 years of age, and students at public schools. Specific goals of the practicum were to acquaint the teacher of preoperational children with the developmental characteristics of such children and with the theories, purposes, and procedures of an expanded version of the language-experience approach. The manual also provides complete lesson models including ready-to-use follow-up activities for the teacher, practical management and record keeping techniques, and models to help teachers explain development in Piagetian terms to parents and administrators. Project evaluation data indicate that the approach was effective in beginning the reading process among preoperational children of all ages (2 through 12 years). Teachers using the manual found it to be clear and helpful. Questionnaires used in evaluating the practicum are appended, along with enthusiastic comments made by teachers who had used the manual. (Author/RH)

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PRACTICUM REPORT

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODIFIED LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH TO A READING PROGRAM FOR THE PRE-OPERATIONAL CHILD

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NOVA UNIVERSITY

JAN 9 1985

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODIFIED LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH TO A READING PROGRAM FOR THE PRE-OPERATIONAL CHILD

PRACTICUM II REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

DIANE D. LONG

NOVA UNIVERSITY
CLUSTER XI

MAY, 1984

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Approved:

Georgianna Lowen

Georgianna Lowen, Ed.D.

August 30, 1984
Date of Final Approval
of Report

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Sincere thanks and appreciation to all who gave their help and support throughout the fieldtesting of the new concept and manual.

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ABSTRACT

The Development and Implementation of a Modified Language-Experience Approach to a Reading Program for the Preoperational Child. Long, Diane 1984 Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early Childhood

This practicum addressed the problem of finding a developmentally sound approach to teaching reading early to young and diagnosed developmentally delayed children. The solution strategy involved the development of an approach to the early teaching of reading to preoperational children through the marriage of Piaget's developmental theories and the language-experience approach to reading. The approach was examined and explained in a manual for implementation and was field tested on a wide scale internationally. The field testers found the approach to be effective in beginning the reading process in their preoperational students of all ages (2-12). They established that the manual was clear and helpful in their implementation process.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

As a kindergarten teacher for many years, the author has observed the changes in societial demands and expectations of young children's cognitive functioning. These demands are directed toward private and public school system administrations at state and local levels, towards individual school administrations, towards teachers and towards the individual child. Many times these demands seem to be in oppostion to the well-accepted theories of child growth and development advanced by such great theorists as Piaget, Gesell, Bates, and others. Yet, as society strains to capture the elusive "best thing for our kids", it seems to march head-long towards non-productivity and perhaps even anti-productivity in its insistance that youngsters "do" and "learn" literally EVERYTHING early in life.

As unpleasant as this trend may be to the trained educator, still one cannot deny its existence and indeed its power in the pressures that it creates for children and those who teach children, alike. Many teachers seem to have "given up the fight", and are simply complying with the demands placed upon them. Others are propounding new ways to explain development and the implications of developmental theory to parents and society as a whole. The problem for the practicing educator persists, though: how to teach cognitive skills to children who may be developmentally not yet ready to effectively learn them, while concurrently re-educating society.

This is a National and even an International problem. As a result of the scope of the problem, this practicum was implemented in several parts of this country and Canada. The cities and states included in the implementation were Covina, California; Glendora, California;

San Dimas, California; Pasadena, California; Central Long Beach, California; New Milford, Connecticut; Marblehead, Massachusetts; Toms River, New Jersey; Spring Lake Heights, New Jersey; Kutztown, Pennsylvania; Radnor, Pennsylvania; Collegeville, Pennsylvania; Norristown, Pennsylvania; Reading, Pennsylvania; Lakeland, Florida; Winter Haven, Florida; Bartow, Florida; Mulberry, Florida; Auburndale, Florida; Franklin, Michigan; and Hamilton, Ontario. (See Figure 1)

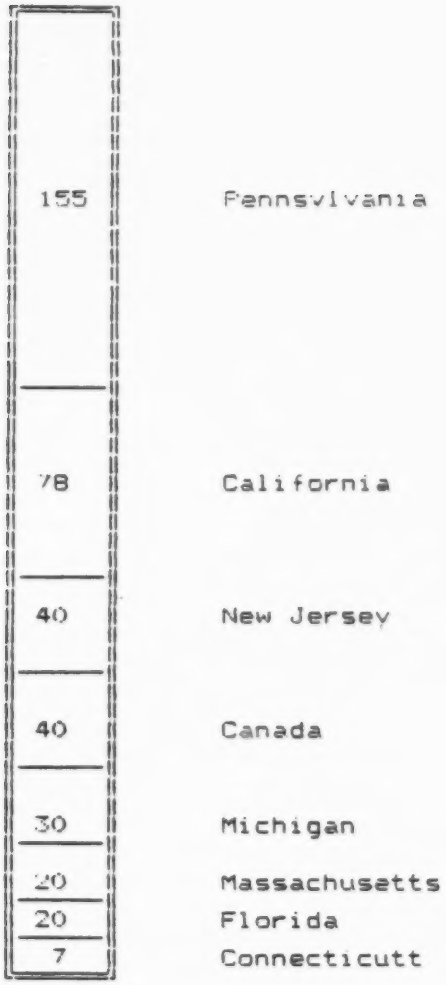
The majority of the children who were involved in the implementation of this practicum were suburban dwellers, but there was a representation of those who live in rural areas, urban areas and inner city areas. (See Figure 2)

These children are mostly Caucasian, some are Black and a few are members of the following racial/ethnic groups: Oriental, Mexican, Cuban, Haitian, Eastern Indian and American Indian. (See Figure 3)

The four hundred and thirty-five children participating range in age from two years to twelve years old. (See Figure 4)

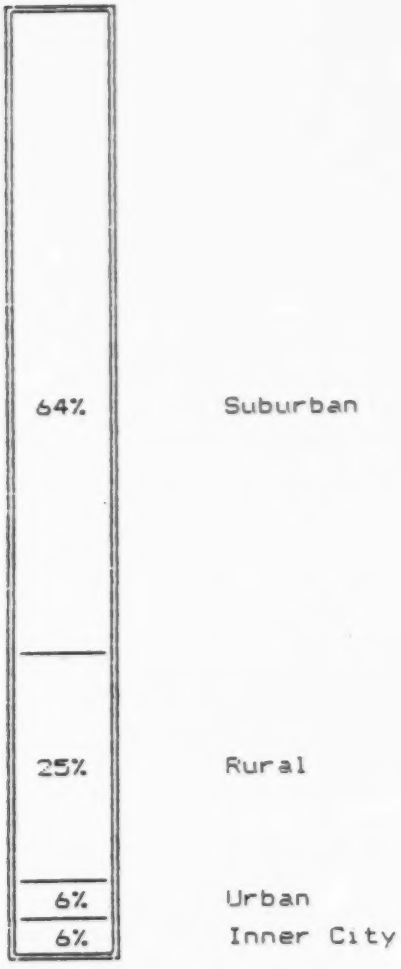
There will be forty-two teachers (representing sixteen systems) field testing this project. These systems represent both the public (including Federal and local governments) and the private school sector. (See Figure 5)

Figure 1



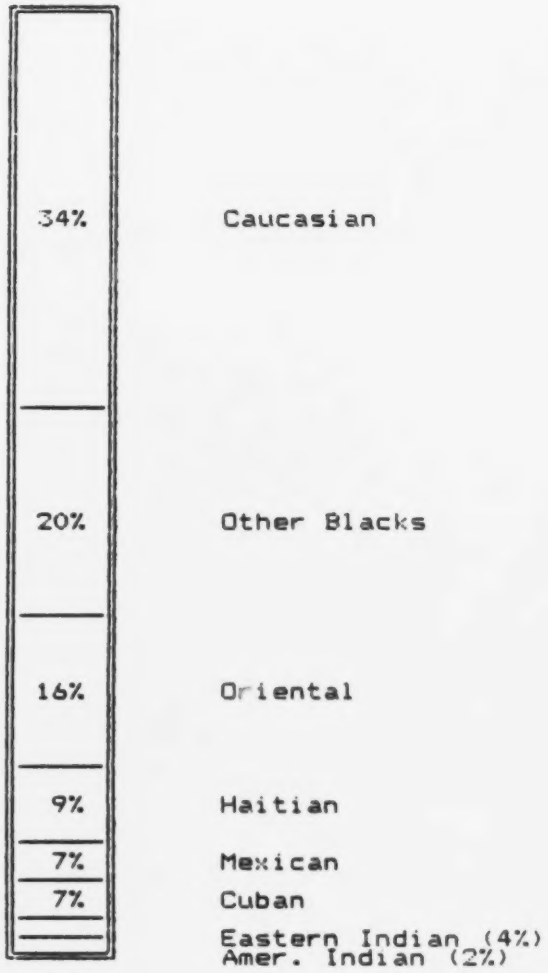
Location of Field Test Subjects

Figure 2



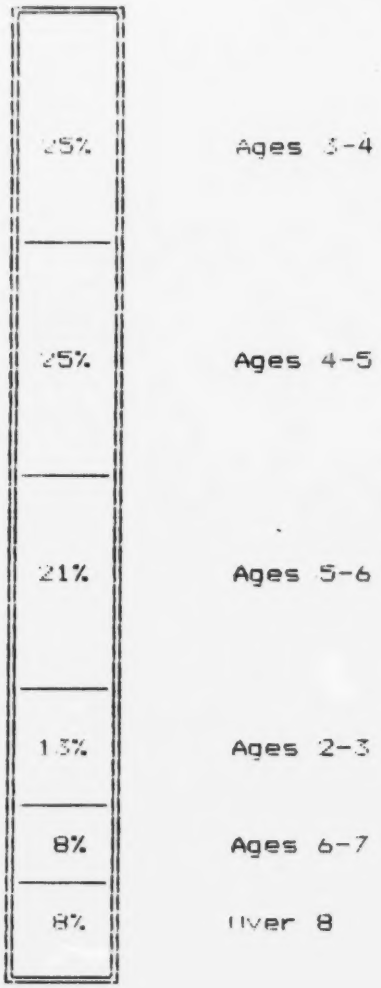
Percentages of Residence Locations

Figure 3



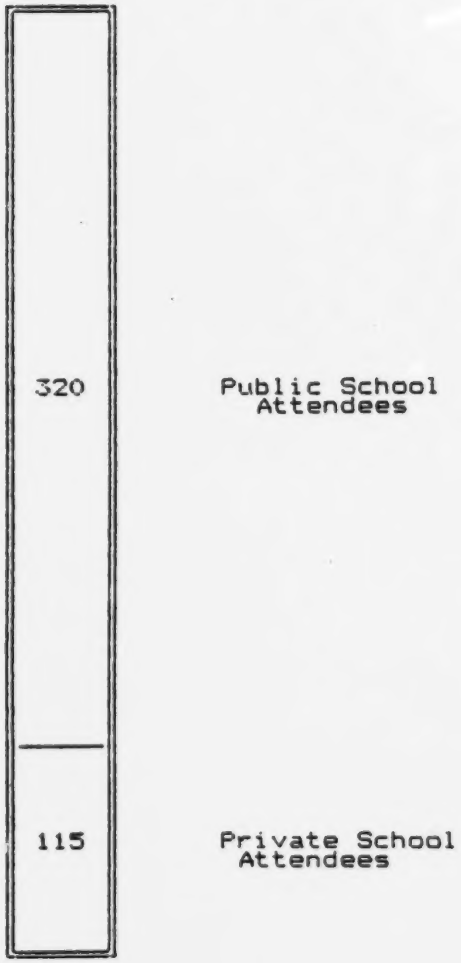
Percentages of Racial/Ethnic Composition

Figure 4



Percentages of Ages of Participants

Figure 5



Types of Funding Programs of Field Test Subjects (Public or Private)

Author's Work Setting and Role

The author functioned in this international setting as a researcher, curriculum developer of a new approach which joins the developmentally sound teachings of Jean Piaget with the language experience approach to reading, and author of a book to help teachers in their search for applicable materials for teaching reading to their pre-operational students, for ways of coping with parental demands for accelerated cognitive teaching, and easy to follow, practical ideas for classroom management techniques and structures. The author also served in the function of coordinating the field testing of the manual on a wide scale, collecting data, and as a resource to teachers in the field.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

As society's interest increases in the early acquisition of cognitive skills, more and more pressure to provide instruction in the cognitive areas is applied to teachers and administrators in schools where pre-operational children are taught. Many times these demands are agreed to without a firm foundation in educational or learning theory. None-the-less, teachers are more and more often placed in a position which requires them to orient their programs in cognitive skill development directions.

However, to further compound the problem, very little developmentally sound material is available to help the teacher to function in this role placed upon her by administrators, parents and, increasingly, by society as a whole.

Problem Documentation

Parents of young children today are constantly bombarded with admonishments to begin the cognitive education of their children at younger and younger ages. Bookstores feature many books which purport to raise IQ scores and to teach very young children reading, math and other types of "mature" subjects such as art appreciation, music (both appreciation and performing) and foreign languages. One chain of bookstores alone, Waldenbooks, carries more than 250 titles. (Langway, 1983) Many of these "How to" manuals are written by professional writers and not by professional educators. Some of these authors are very aggressive and elicit a variety of guilt feelings from parents as they speak in lectures, workshops and on radio and television. They are, of course, in the business of selling books. If they can convince people of their ideas, they will sell books. Unfortunately, most of their ideas and premises are not well-founded in authenic learning theories. Solovitch (1983) reminds us that "Formal instruction in the early years has been repudiated by almost every major thinker in the field--from Arnold Gesell, whose book, "The First Five Years of Life," has long been the nursery school teacher's Bible, to Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist whose writings on cognitive development have shaped a generation of psychologists, educators and parents."

However, these ideas for academic achievment do persist and seem to be gaining popularity. Famed developmentalist, T. Berry Brazelton of Harvard, sadly reports, "Everyone wants to raise the smartest kid in America rather than the best adjusted, happiest kid." (Langway, 1983) Many of these new programs are presented in an argumentative tone and profess learning theories which are out of step with the mainstream of educators who base their learning theories on research and experience. Many of today's parents of young children attended college during the sixties and early seventies, when dissidence and challenges to social norms were

fashionable. This background, then, may help to explain why some parents find these argumentative presentations appealing, and find it easy to embrace the ideas they present.

Another possible factor for the parental insistence of early cognitive training is offered by psychologist David Elkind, who views this social phenomena as the exploitation (whether consciously or unconsciously) of children as a status symbol. He explains, "while parents have traditionally taken pride in their offspring's achievements and have been concerned about their education, it is a unique characteristic of contemporary society that we burden preschoolers with the expectations and anxieties normally (if wrongly) visited upon high school seniors." (Elkind, 1981)

Renowed child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim has postulated that "once parents stopped worrying about toilet training their children at an early age, they needed a substitute object for parental angst, and settled on academic achievement." (Solovitch, 1983)

More graphically explained, "When it comes to a child's success in life, the parent's ego is on the chopping block." (Solovitch, 1983)

In the Washington suburban area the emphasis on early learning seems typical of many sections of the country. An observation of a nearby, typical private preschool found "They are testing 3-year olds for 'reading readiness,' offering French and Spanish lessons for children who can barely ask for a glass of water in English, providing a hands-on computer program in basic math skills and issuing three-page reports that evaluate a 3-year old's contribution to group discussion, ability to identify a rhombus, seriate shades of color and shake hands with "appropriate greeting." (Solovitch, 1983) Long waiting lists are evident in private schools offering highly cognitively oriented curriculums. Many of these schools have high tuition and materials costs, but parents do not appear detered. Barbara Bowman, director of the Erikson Institute for the Advanced Study of Childhood in Chicago, advances this postulation. "The problem is that the kind of learning that children do is difficult to see and keep track of. Years ago we'd say, 'Oh, your child is playing just fine.' We didn't say, 'As a child plays with blocks he learns a one-to-one relationship which is the basis of mathematical knowledge.' The early pressure tanks exist because

we, and by we I mean the public, understand so little of child development. A lot of people are running programs who don't have the foggiest notion of what end of a little kid is up." (Solovitch, 1983)

As expected, many parents with children in public schools are also caught in this imperative early reading mode of thought. According to a recent study of parents and teachers of public school kindergarten children, (Jones, 1983) parents felt that everything about reading in the kindergarten was important, while teachers selected components of reading and prereading skills for special emphasis. Jones (1983) further concludes that "parents seemed to have a more positive attitude toward teaching reading in kindergarten than teachers."

School administrators and teachers are feeling the brunt of this drive and are compelled to "teach reading" to younger and younger children. As teachers struggle to implement "reading" in their pre-operational classrooms, they find exsisting materials to be inappropriate for their young students. Two options remain: to develop their own materials (which takes an enormous investment of time and effort) or to use the materials at hand in a "watered-down" way to better meet the needs of their students. Neither solution appears attractive to most conscientious teachers.

Some educators look to the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to teaching reading for answers to some of their problems. But, again, they find stumbling blocks on this road to reading. Beyond theoretical and research studies, there has been very little specific information written to help the LEA implementor. Precious less has been written to help implement LEA in the classrooms of young children and those with specific learning and language problems.

The Related Literature

For many years, educators have understood the enchantment created for a child when he realizes that his unique ideas can be stored on paper using "special, little squiggles", for himself and others to later enjoy. In a description of teaching reading fifty years ago, Ribovich (1978) reports, "Beginners also had language experience reading. The materials were either teacher-made stories or composite stories with parts contributed by children from their conversations on a particular topic." (p. 374)

Roach Van Allen, (1965) who is perhaps the grandfather of the modern LEA movement reminds us that "children learn best what they want to learn. The essence of the teaching act that considers the feelings and attitudes of learners to be as important as the development of skills is the art of raising the levels of sensitivity of each child to his environment, so that he can, basically, see more, hear more and feel more." (p. 5)

It is also known that (Cannela, 1980) "A 5 to 8 year old brings to school certain limitations in dealing with the world around him. These limitations do not represent a knowledge gap, but a qualitative difference in the way a pre-operational child perceives the world." (p. 4)

Many educational scholars (Ginsburg, 1969; Van Kleech, 1980; Kamii, 1982; Waller, 1977; Farnham-Diggory, 1977; Furth, 1975; Hoffman, 1979; Weikart, 1971; Thibault, 1982; and countless others) have embraced the Piagetian developmental points of view. Elkind (1981) summarized thusly: "In recent years, evidence has been accumulating in support of the stages described by Piaget. The tests he devised to reveal the stages now have been used in more than half the countries in the world with amazingly comparable results. Children all over the world go through these stages, at least up to adolescence. In addition, Herman Epstein of Brandeis University

in Boston has recently compiled data to show that brain growth after birth occurs in 'spurts' at just the ages at which Piaget postulated major transformations in children's thinking. There is, therefore, considerable evidence to support the stages of development as described by Piaget." (p. 97-98)

This Piagetian theory of development advances the notion that all children must pass through a certain pattern of thinking stages which are definitely predictable and occur when children reach certain ages of life. For some children, the stages may be slightly excelerated at times. For other children, the stages may not be reached at the expected time due to a slower developmental pattern for that individual, or due to a language or learning disability. Piaget feels that learning is a function of "development", rather than development as a function of learning. (Hetherington, 1979)

For the purposes of this practicum, the reader is most concerned with children aged two or three through seven or eight. Piaget calls the children in this age group "pre-operational". (Hetherington, 1979)

Hetherington (1979) furthers the reader's understanding of the Piagetian pre-operational child with a description of characteristics of these children. He begins with an explanation that Piaget divides this pre-operational time into two periods: the preconceptual period (which encompasses children from around age two to those around the age of four) and the intuitive period (which involves those children who are around age four to those around age seven or eight).

Piaget views the major characteristic of preconceptual thought is the appearance of systems of representation, such as language. Piaget refers to this as 'symbolic function'. "In the preconceptual period the emergence of the symbolic function is shown in the rapid development of language, in imaginative play, and in the increase in deferred imitation." (p. 318) This period of preconceptual thought has major limitations that the educator needs to keep in mind in dealing with these children. These limitations are animism and egocentrism. "Children in this period attribute life to inanimate objects. Plants may hurt when they are picked. The wind may be talking to his friends the trees." (p. 319)

These children are also egocentric. "The child believes the universe is organized and created for

him and is centered on him. He has difficulty seeing any point of view but his own. Although egocentrism is most marked in the preconceptual period, Piaget feels that it continues throughout the entire pre--operational stage and into the concrete operational stage." (p. 319)

The intuitive period of thought "is applied to the child in the period from four to seven years; this term is appropriate because although certain mental "operations" (such as ways of classifying, quantifying, or relating objects) occur, the child does not seem to be aware of the principles he or she has used in the performance of these operations. Although the child can solve problems involving these operations, he or she cannot explain the reasons for solving a problem in a certain way. Although the child's symbols are becoming increasingly complex, reasoning and thinking processes have certain characteristic limitations which are manifested in a variety of tasks." (p. 320) These limitation-characteristic tasks include the child's inability to order things on the basis of one dimension, such as seriation. Other limitations manifest themselves in part-whole relationship tasks, conservation tasks, and irreversibility tasks.

Tadlock (1980) relates these Piagetian characteristics to the characteristics needed to read. She reminds us that because the child does not have the ability to decenter (to consider all characteristics similtaneously) that problems may arise when the child is faced with an array of letters (words). "Since they (the children) have successfully dealt with letters in isolation, it seems to the teacher (whose cognitive structures are more advanced) that it should be a simple task to blend the sounds represented by the letters into words." (p. 4) Tadlock reminds us of the 1966 Durkin study which found that curiosity about printed language began with an interest in scribbling and drawing followed by copying objects and letters of the alphabet.

In summary Tadlock proposes that "the teacher may wish to implement a communication and graphic imagery into his or her lessons as effective learning strategies. The classroom teacher may also wish to implement a communication oriented approach to reading instruction through the use of 1) environmental print; 2) reading to children, and 3) language experiences activities which encourage scribbling as well as drawing and writing." (p. 6)

Famed reading expert J. Veatch concurs, "I must say that if Piaget is right in that children move through sensorimotor, pre-operational stages differing in ages but not in sequence, to that of a concrete operational stage of thorough understanding, then a similiar kind of development MUST take place as children proceed through the years to the operations of learning to read and write. (p.7)

Due, then to the Piagetian position that, "language transmits only that which has been learned through concrete experiences; thus, development of thought, especially in young children, stimulates language development, rather than the other way around." (Hoffman, 1979)

These positions lead one to the assumption that young children, with their recognized developmental strengths and weaknesses, can best learn to read material which has direct relationships to their own individual lives, which is meaningful to them, derived from concrete, personal experiences. These premises are basic to the essence of the Language Experience Approach to reading.

Allen (1967) articulates these basic ideas: "He (the student) conceptualizes: what I can think about, I can talk about; what I can say, I can write (or someone can write for me); what I can write, I can read; I can read what others write for me to read." (p.1)

"When the infant communicates, he wants to communicate more," notes Baghban (1981). She further asserts that central to the concept of the speech act is 'dialogue'. She continues that when a child writes (or someone writes for him) his writing assumes an audience and thus a dialogue. In the LEA process the child can "compose according to his theory of the world" and the mismatch between the spoken language patterns and written language are eliminated.

Allen writes (1969) that the thoughts of each child are the basic ingredients of the LEA process.

"Language Experience Approach provides early immersion in print. Especially appropriate for the Deviant and Prephonetic speller, LEA provides a vehicle for conceptualization of the alphabetic principle, letter-sound correspondence, left-to-right orientation, and the

child's first concept of 'what is a word.'" (Gentry, 1981, p. 380)

Addressing the special concerns of children with reading problems or potential reading problems, Noble (1981) notes that "proponents of the language experience approach suggest that children who have difficulty in learning to read can benefit from starting with their own words. In child dictated stories, the child's own words appear to make reading meaningful and interesting and to provide high motivation for reading." (p. 387)

Concerning children who are learning to read who do not speak English or who are learning to speak English, Chapman (1977) asserts that "dictating stories to read solved the syntax problem for students learning to speak English." (p. 152)

Reknown Piagetian expert, Kamii (1982) wrote "If adults create an atmosphere that indirectly encourages thinking, children come up with a host of relationships that surprise us." (p. 29)

Garman (1978) observes that "with the language experience approach, a teacher can be assured that beginning readers have opportunities to interact with material that is congruent with their level of oral language development. Such interaction will facilitate reading instruction and will help children learn to read." (p. 396)

"In some European and American schools, average five year olds are taught to read, but the type of teaching and pace of instruction is highly individualized." (Rogers, no date, p. 11)

Researchers have also explored the effects of LEA in a host of ways. Anderson (1967) reports that the word count of those stories being read by children engaged in the LEA approach indicates the reading vocabulary is from three to four times as great as that introduced in any standard basic reader at the preprimer level.

Harris (1972) reported that first, second and third grade students who were involved in the LEA process as a supplement to their basal reading programs scored significantly higher on the reading achievement scores on the Stanford Reading Test. Harris also reported better writing abilities in those students and a higher display of creativity.

A more developed oral vocabulary was reported by Giles (1966) for those students involved with the LEA process. Giles further stated that this advantage appeared greater for boys than for the girls in his study.

Stockler (1977), studying children who were already considered to have "failed" to learn to read, reported that LEA could motivate those students by allowing them to produce stories concerning themselves, their culture, and their lives.

In a study of first graders using LEA by Henderson, Estes and Stonecash (1972), it was found that by mid-year the extent of the reading vocabulary of those students compared favorably with those students in basal programs.

Bennett (1971), working with four and five year olds, found that the children had better word retention skills using the LEA process than did child using commercially prepared materials.

Guthrie (1981), reporting the studies of teaching methods by Pflaum, Walberg, Karegianeas and Rasher, found that two teaching approaches were significantly superior to control groups. The first approach was the "sound-symbol" blending and the second was any "unique or novel" approach. (p. 494)

Affective factors were also of interest to the researchers. Riendeau (1973) found that at the end of the first grade the LEA group was found to have developed significantly greater self-esteem, social interest, individuation, realism, identification with friends and a preference for friends than did the basal group.

Pienaar (1977) reported that children who used the LEA process to learn to read gained in awareness, assurance, self-reliance, persistence, and cooperativeness. They appear eager to express themselves. Pienaar found, too that the LEA experience facilitated peer-education and encouraged children to evolve their own learning strategies, to work at their own pace, in their own rhythm and style. It unabled the learner to understand the purpose of phonics due to the fact that they used those phonic skills daily. The teachers in this study commented that, "the pupils are required to think and reason" (p. 495), and that, in the teachers' opinions, the children were more creative. The teachers also

noted that they felt that the LEA process overcame the problems encountered in culturally contaiminated materials.

Some reading authorities offer specific suggestions to the pre-operational reading teacher. Lesiak (1978) reminds the teacher of the value of labelling pictures.

In a study of the Idaho program, "Communications Skills Through Authorship" (CSTA), Smith (1976) reports that the children dictated stories into a tape recorder and a typist later typed the stories using a primary typewriter.

Roach Van Allen (1969) offers other options for recording the beginners' stories. He includes painting, drawing, modeling, construction, talking, dictating, and creative writing. He further suggests picture writing (a series of student created pictures) to unable the pre-writing child to independently produce his own stories.

Anderson (1967) lists many skills that are important to the beginning reader that can be incorporated into the LEA program. Those skills include: " left to right (eye movement); line to line progression; awareness of sentence structure; increased power of sustained attention; ability to organize ideas; ability to sound out words; ability to hear and recognize endings such as '-s', '-ed', '-ing'; use of context clues to recognize words in stories written by their classmates; and sight vocabulary of those words which naturally reoccur in children's writing." (p. 269)

Concerning the teaching of reading skills, Groff (1980) reports that "children who are intensively instructed in phonics early develop superior word recognition skills."
(p. 58)

Name recognition practice was suggested by Kamii (1982), through the use of an attendance chart that each student would have daily contact with.

Bereiter and Engelmann (no date) suggest helping the reluctant "talker" to communicate during the course of games such as the "Question-Asking Game".

Another interesting reading activity was presented by McCracken (1980). She suggests that charts with

the lyrics of previously learned songs, rhymes, or stories be used.

Like McCracken, Parker (1978) suggests preparing charts to reinforce attitudes and general concepts about words and reading. However, Parker advises the use of playground chants as the vehicle for this practice.

Schickedanz (1977) reminds us to use written words (in the form of signs or labels) in children's dramatic play settings.

Mathias (1977) offers the idea of providing opportunities for children to read instructions for art projects and recipes.

An unique reinforcing activity was offered by Nilsen (1978). To evaluate comprehension, etc., drawing pictures with florescent crayons, creating black light puppet shows using student-made florescent tennis ball puppets, or using florescent modelling clay to depict story scenes were suggested.

Esgar (1978) elaborates upon the idea of using child-produced pictures to evaluate word comprehension. He says that "drawing a picture involves decision making, organization, small muscle coordination, comprehension, internalizing and creativity." (p. 494) He further states that this is an interesting task that is easy for the teacher to check and evaluate.

From a macrocosmic viewpoint, Allen (1967) tells us that children succeed through a variety of experiences. He sees the classroom as a laboratory.

In terms of ability grouping children, Lesiak (1978) finds that in a LEA scenario in a ungrouped situation "one child will be learning the names of a variety of animals, another will be building a sight vocabulary." (p.137-8).

In some organizational situations, however, grouping is necessary or mandated by the educational leader. Feshbach (1977) found that "systematic assessments by teachers of children's classroom performance in kindergarten are reliably related to subsequent performance in first [through third] grade and are as efficient predictors as psychometric test scores." (p. 307)

Ames (1980) offers some notions about development. She reports that "Nature, more often than not, knows what she is doing." (p.9) She explains that behavior develops through a series of small, orderly steps and that those steps may be subtle and intricate. She warns that the steps may be unobservable to the non-trained person. Ames suggestes that parents "...think about something as basic and as un-anxiety provoking as your baby's teething. Though the first of one's first child or grandchild admittedly can provide a good deal of excitment (how could he do that all by himself?), admittedly after the first (child or tooth), most people take the whole process of teething rather calmly..." (p.10)

Baghban (1981) continues this approach. "Parents rarely doubt that their children will learn to talk and their children sense this confidence."

However, Tadlock (1980) does warn us that the stage of concrete operations facilitates the process of learning to read.

. The pre-operational child, then, has specific learning restrictions and characteristics. The child's systems of representation are emerging in a variety of ways. The child is egocentric and animistic. The child's thinking processes have specific limitations. Keeping these characteristics in clear perspective, the educator can design a reading program for these children that is self-paced, egocentric in its basic premise, and truly meets the individual needs of each pre-operational child, no matter what his age. The best suited program for this type of approach to reading is the Language Experience Approach.

In this LEA arena of learning, then, the pre-operational child has an excellent chance for reading success, providing that instruction is aimed to his individual developmental needs, according to the teachings of Piaget.

CHAPTER THREE

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Statement of Goals

The goals and objectives of this language experience approach (LEA) to reading manual for pre-operational children was several-fold. One was to acquaint the teacher of pre-operational children with the Piagetian characteristics, problems, limitations and potentialities of those children. Another was to acquaint the teacher with the theories and purposes of the expanded version of LEA, as defined by the author. Still another goal was to acquaint the teacher with the procedures involved with the expanded version of LEA, as defined by the author.

A further goal of this manual was to provide lesson models for the teacher, complete with ready-to-use follow-up activities. Another goal was to provide the teacher with practical management techniques for the use with the expanded version of LEA, as defined by the author. To provide the teacher with practical record keeping techniques was also a goal of this manual.

The final goal of this project was to provide the teachers with models to help them as they explain development, in Piagetian terms, to parents and administrators.

Behavioral Expectations

It was expected that the behavior of the teachers would reflect a more comfortable and relaxed attitude when using LEA to teach pre-operational children to read. It was also expected that they would understand the expanded LEA process, and that they would generally find the manual helpful in their daily use of the theory.

Evaluation Instruments

The standard of the performance (successfulness) of the manual was assessed on a post-implementation instrument administered to the participating teachers. (See Appendix A)

The data collected from this instrument was expected to be compared and contrasted to data collected earlier, using a pre-implementation instrument, The Long LEA Pre-Questionaire, (see Appendix B) and specifically so designed questions on a post-implementation instrument, The Long LEA Post-Questionaire, (see Appendix A) for analyze.

However, when only 16% of the field testers responded to the pre-questionare, it was clear that other strategies were needed.

A third questionaire was prepared. (See Appendix C). Its function was to replace both the pre and post questionaire, with questions designed to give a wide scope of answers.

A number of strategies were employed to assure a higher percentage of responses. The questionaire was written in a concise, easy to understand style. It offered multiple choice questions, rather than essay questions in an effort to reduce respondents' intimidation reactions. It was printed on bright, golden-rod colored paper in an effort to help the respondent "keep track" of the form. A personal note was enclosed in all of the packets thanking the fieldtesters for their help. An incentive in the form of three, ready to use learning stations were offered to each participant. A deadline was suggested in the general letter to emphasize the importance of the questionaire to the respondent. And finally, a self-addressed, stamped envelope was included in the packet for the convenience of the field-tester.

As the deadline approached, an attempt in person or by phone was made to contact all who had not as yet responded to the questionaire.

As a result, 49% of the original field testers completed the last questionaire.

It was anticipated that seventy-five percent of the teachers would demonstrate an understanding of developmental processes and LEA, as measured by the Long LEA Final-Questionaire (see Appendix C).

These understandings were judged as such through the use of the following final test grading key:

Question 1: Please state the basic premise behind the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to reading.
To be judged as correct, the answer must include 4 of these 5 points:

-Child has an experience
-He thinks about the experience
-He talks about the experience
-He writes (or dictates) the experience
-He reads the experience story

Question 2: Please state some basic learning characteristics of the child age 2-7 (or pre-operational).
To be judged as correct, the answer must include 5 of these 7 points:
(Note: A description of the term or the term itself is an acceptable answer.)

-He is beginning to think symbolically
-He is involved in imaginative play
-He solves some problems intuitively
-He is egocentric
-He is animistic
-He has difficulty understanding irrevesibility
-He does not understand conservation

CHAPTER FOUR

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Selected Solutions

One method to teach pre-operational children to read might be the basal reader approach. This method is, in fact, used by many early childhood and special education teachers. Most sensitive teachers who use this approach, however, have found the method to be most unsatisfactory to teach the pre-operational child to read. This is the case due to the fact that the books and the instructional lessons were written for children who are functioning at a more advanced developmental level, and these materials therefore, cannot meet the needs (nor the interests) of the pre-operational child.

The linguistic approach has also been used in an attempt to teach the pre-operational child to learn to read. Although this method does meet some of the developmental needs of the pre-operational child, it has none-the-less been found to be inadequate to met the child's very special requirements for a successful reading approach.

Although developmental educators understand the limitations of learning to read that the pre-operational child encounters, it is realized that many teachers are being required to teach reading to these same children. It was the basic goal of this practicum work, to provide them with some tools to begin to teach reading, then, in the most developmental and logical ways possible.

Report of Action Taken

The author has developed a model which incorporates the teachings of Piaget and Gesell with the language experience approach to reading. Famed early childhood educator, Richard Goldman, notes that he "sees a match between the language experience approach and Piagetian theory".

With this model and encouragement in hand, the author has written a manual for teachers of pre-operational children and has field tested that manual throughout the country.

The manual contains sections which explain Piagetian theory in easy-to-understand terms to the teacher. It provides the teacher with characteristics of the pre-operational child. It explains the theories and rationale behind LEA and the ramifications of the marriage of the two theories, as seen by the author.

The manual also gives specific directions to the teacher in how to implement this program. Those directions include specific examined experiences and ideas for experiences. It gives explicit directions for the procedures involved in the expanded LEA, and management ideas for the implementation of those procedures. The manual provides the teacher with ready-to-use examples of how to organize and reinforce skill activities in the format of a three-group rotation system. It offers suggestions to the teacher on how to group and generally organize the class, even though that class may contain as many as thirty children.

The manual also provides the teacher with a number of examples for use when explaining development according to Piaget and/or Gesell to parents and administrators.

CALENDAR

June-Sept.	Curriculum Research
Sept.-Oct.	Contact field-testing teachers
Nov.	Complete proposal Write manual
Dec.	Mail proposal Complete manual
Jan.	Mail pretest and manual Compile pretest data Answer teachers' questions and concerns
Feb.	Answer teachers' questions and concerns
March	Distribute and collect post-test
June	Compile post-test data Complete and submit report

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The results of the field testing of this unique approach to teaching reading to pre-operational children using a blend of Piagetian theories and the language experience approach to reading were extraordinary. Of the 43 original participants, 49% responded to the final questionaire.

Of those participants, 100% were able to correctly identify the basic ideas on the LEA continuum, as judged by the fore-to-mentioned guidelines. Moreover, 81% received a perfect score by correctly identifying all five ideas. (See Figure 6)

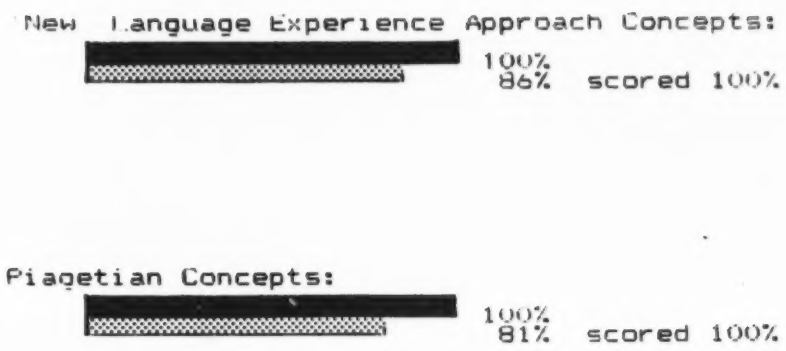
Similiarly, 100% correctly identified the basic Piagetian characteristics of the pre-operational child, while 86% received a perfect score by correctly naming the seven basic characteristics. (See Figure 6)

One hundred percent of those responding indicated that upon reading the manual, they understood The New LEA.

Significantly, 100% indicated that the procedures suggested in the manual were helpful in the implementation of the New LEA in their classroom.

A tally of the items in the section of the questionaire dealing specifically with the various lesson model portions of the manual showed that 95% tried the "examined experiences" models. 100% of those that tried those models judged them to be "good", 0% found them to be "OK", and 0% found them to be "poor".

Figure 6



Percentages of Participants Demonstrating

Mastery of Concepts Presented

In Manual

Ninety-five percent indicated that they tried the "contriving stories" models. Ninety-five percent of those found them to be "good", 5% said they were "OK", and 0% said they were "poor". (See Figure 7)

Seventy-six percent used the "flow charts of skills" in their planning. One hundred percent of those judged them as "good", none saw them as "OK" or as "poor". (See Figure 7)

Eighty-six percent used the "follow-up activities". One hundred percent of those found them to be "good", while none judged them to be "OK" or as "poor". (See Figure 7)

The "reinforcing stations" models were implemented by 71%. Ninety-three percent of those found them to be "good", 7% to be "OK", and 0% to be "poor". (See Figure 7)

Seventy-one percent said that they used the "Word Bank activities" and 93% judged them to be "good". Seven percent said they were "OK", and 0% said they were "poor". (See Figure 7)

The actual classroom management of any LEA program is many times a problem for the teacher. However, 95% of these fieldtesters found that the practical suggestions for managing LEA in their classrooms were useful to them. (See Figure 8)

Eighty-one percent found the record keeping techniques for using LEA in their classrooms were helpful. However, 75% of the participants who had not tried these techniques indicated in unsolicitated comments that had they started the year with these techniques in hand, they would have used them to replace their established record keeping procedures. (See Figure 8)

With regards to explaining Piagetian development to parents and/or administrators, 95% of the respondents found the suggestions and strategies offered in the book to be helpful. (See Figure 8)

Most importantly, 95% of the participating field testers indicated that using LEA in their classroom seems managable to them after reading this book. (See Figure 8)

Figure 7

Component:

Examined Experiences

95% used them
100% judged them GOOD

Contriving Stories

95% used them
95% judged them GOOD
5% judged them OK

Flow Chart of Skills

76% used them
100% judged them GOOD

Follow-up Activities

86% used them
100% judged them GOOD

Reinforcing Activities

71% used them
93% judged them GOOD
7% judged them OK

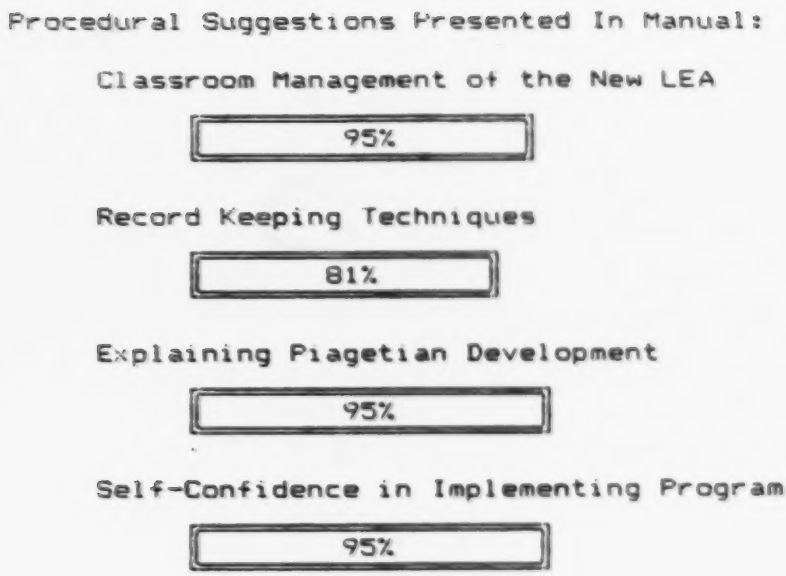
Word Bank Activities

71% used them
93% judged them GOOD
7% judged them OK

Percentages of Participants Who Used and Evaluated

The Lesson Model Components

Figure 8


Procedural Suggestions Presented In Manual:
Classroom Management of the New LEA
95%
Record Keeping Techniques
81%
Explaining Piagetian Development
95%
Self-Confidence in Implementing Program
95%
Percentage of Participants
Who Found Manual Procedures Practical

A number of the respondents also made comments. Many of the comments were very complementary. Some of those offered suggestions, while a few offered criticisms. (See Appendix D.)

In this responding group there was a wide range of ages. 10% were aged 18-21; 14% were 22-28; 33% were 29-34; 29% were 35-45 and 14% were 46 or over.

Fifty-seven percent taught in private schools, while 43% taught in public schools, including Head Start.

The educational background of the group was also varied. Twenty-four percent had community college training; 5% had a CDA credential; 31% had a bachelor's degree; 20% had a master's degree; and 20% had a doctorate.

Sixty-two percent remembered learning about LEA in college.

Conclusions

The data clearly and often dramatically indicates that this original marriage of Piagetian theories and the language experience approach to teaching pre-operational children to read was eagerly embraced by the respondents.

They generally found the models to be of help in their own implementation of the method.

The sophisticated and often obtuse concepts behind Piagetian theories were easily mastered upon reading and studying the manual.

Moreover, they indicated that they were confident enough in the skills that they had gained by reading the book to implement this approach in their own situations.

These facts lead to the conclusion that this new blend of Piaget and LEA can be successfully and enthusiastically implemented in all types of learning situations involving pre-operational children. The teachers feel comfortable in their understandings of the theories behind the approach, and are given supportive help with record keeping, classroom management, and parents and administrators.

Recommendations

The author recommends that the manual be extended to include a wider variety of model lesson plans and follow-up activities. A further recommendation is that more specific and extensive examples of contriving stories be presented to the reader.

Generally, to educators who find themselves in the predicament described in this report, the author offers a few recommendations. First, the educator should keep a realistic list of priorities in mind. The well being of the children, are of course, a major concern. However, the educator must realize and accept the framework that each educational situation is built upon and succeed at working within that framework.

Secondly, while attempting to either overtly or covertly educate administrators and parents concerning cognitive development, the author strongly suggests that the educator be especially aware of the semantics used in the discussions. Great attention should be paid to words that may having different meanings to different individuals as the entire conversation could be affected by misunderstandings.

Dissemination

This practicum project will be disseminated in a variety of ways. The author will present this project at the 1984 Nova University National Summer Institute, in conjunction with the university's doctoral program in early childhood education.

Proposals for other presentions have been submitted to the International Reading Association for their national conference in the Spring of 1985, to the 1985 National ACEI (Association for Childhood Education International) Study Conference, and to the 1985 National ASCD (Association for Supervisors and Curriculum Developers) Spring Conference.

The practicum will further be disseminated through journal articles written by the author.

The manual itself is currently being considered for publication by a major test book publisher.

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APPENDIX A

LONG LEA POST-QUESTIONAIRE

1. Please state the basic premise behind the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to reading.

I don't know

2. Please state some basic learning characteristics of the child age 2-7 (or pre-operational).

I don't know

3. Do you understand the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to teaching reading?

yes - no

4. Have the procedures suggested in this manual been helpful to you in your implementation of LEA in your classroom?

yes - no

5. As you think about the lesson models in the manual, please circle the appropriate responses:

Examined experiences: I didn't try any

I tried some
. They were: good - OK
poor

Contriving stories: I didn't try any

I tried some
They were: good - OK
poor

Flow charts of skills: I didn't use them in planning
I used them in planning
They were: good - OK
poor

Follow-up activities: I didn't use them
I used some
They were: good - OK
poor

Reinforcing stations: I didn't try any
I tried some
They were: good - OK
poor

Word Bank activities: I didn't try any

I tried some
They were: good - OK
poor

6. The practical suggestions for managing LEA in my classroom were useful to me.

yes - no

7. The record keeping techniques for using LEA in my classroom were helpful.

yes - no

8. The examples given in the manual were helpful to me in explaining Piagetian development to parents and/or administrators.

yes - no

9. Using LEA in my classroom seems managable to me after reading this manual.

yes - no

Please circle the category that applies to you.

1. Ages of children that I teach: 2-3 5-6
3-4 6-7
4-5 7-8
Other (Please list)_____

2. My age: 18-21 35-45
22-28 over 46
29-34

3. I teach in a (private school) (public school).

4. The extent of my education in early childhood education:
   some training (community college)
   CDA Credential
   bachelor's degree
   master's degree
   doctorate

5. The portion of the country that I live in is the:
   East Central
   South West

6. I remember learning about LEA during my teacher training.

   yes - no

7. My name is: _____

SUGGESTIONS, COMMENTS, OR CONCERNS: Please share any insights about specific improvements or changes that may have occured to you while you were testing this manual. (Use the other side, if necessary)

APPENDIX B

LONG LEA PRE-QUESTIONAIRE

1. Please state the basic premise behind the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to reading.

I don't know

2. Please state the learning characteristics of children in the 2-7 age range.

I don't know

3. Have you heard about the Language Experience Approach (LEA) of teaching youngsters to read?

yes - no

4. Do you fully understand the procedures involved in using LEA in your classroom?

yes - no

5. Would examples of specific methods be helpful to you?

yes - no

6. Would you like some practical suggestions for managing LEA in your classroom?

yes - no

7. Would you like some practical record keeping techniques for using LEA in your classroom?

yes - no

8. Would you like some examples to use when you are explaining Piagetian development to parents and administrators?

yes - no

9. If you have heard of LEA, does it seem unmanagable to you in your teaching situation?

yes - no - does not apply to me

Please circle the category that applies to you.

1. Number of children that I teach: _____

2. Ages of children that I teach: 2-3 5-6
3-4 6-7
4-5 8-9
Other (Please list) _____

3. My age: 18-21 35-45
22-28 over 46
29-34

4. I teach in a (private school) (public school).

5. The extent of my education in early childhood education:
some training (community college)
CDA Credential
bachelor's degree
master's degree

doctorate

6. The portion of the country that I live in is the:
   East Central
   South West

7. Approximately how many children of each racial/ethnic group do you teach?
   Caucasian_____

   Black (except Haitians)_____

   Oriental_____

   Hispanic (Cuban, Mexican, etc.)_____

   Other (Haitian, Indian, etc.)_____

8. Approximately how many of your students live in these areas?
   Rural_____ Suburban_____

   Urban_____ Inner-city_____

9. Why are you interested in using this LEA manual?

   _____My administrator told me to try LEA.

   _____I wanted to try LEA.

10. My name is _____.

Please list your comments or concerns here: (continue on the back, if necessary)

APPENDIX C

LONG'S FINAL QUESTIONAIRE

1. Before reading the book, "Piaget and LEA: Partners in Early Reading", I completely understood the ideas behind the language experience approach to reading (LEA).

yes no

Now that you have read the manual, please circle the five basic ideas on the LEA continuum.

experiencing	computing
thinking	speaking
recording	typing
remembering	reading

2. Before reading the manula, I completely understood the basic characteristics of the child 2-7 (pre-operational).

yes no

Now that you have read the manual, please indicate with a check mark as many of the seven basic characteristics according to Piaget, of the pre-operational child as you can.

____he is between ages 2 or 3 through 6 or 7 years old, or diagnosed as developmentally delayed
____he is between ages 6 or 7 through 12
____he is beginning to think symbolically
____he is beginning to walk
____he is beginning to solve some problems intuitively
____he is egocentric
____he feels that everything is alive
____he is troubled by the idea of irreversibility
____he can think abstractly
____he has good small muscle control
____he can only think of one characteristic of an object at a time

3. Before I read the manual, I completely and fully understood the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to reading?

yes no

Now that you have read the manual, do you understand LEA?

4. Have the procedures suggested in this manual been helpful to you in your implementation of LEA in your classroom?

yes no

5. As you think about the lesson models in the manual, please circle the appropriate responses:

Examined experiences: I didn't try any

I tried some
They were: good - OK
poor

Contriving stories: I didn't try any

I tried some
They were: good - OK
poor

Flow charts of skills: I didn't use them in planning
I used them in planning
They were: good - OK
poor

Follow-up activities: I didn't use them
I used some
They were: good - OK
poor

Reinforcing stations: I didn't try any
I tried some
They were: good - OK
poor

Word Bank activities: I didn't try any

I tried some

They were: good - OK
poor

6. The practical suggestions for managing LEA in my classroom were useful to me.

yes no

7. The record keeping techniques for using LEA in my classroom were helpful.

yes no

8. The examples given in the manual were helpful to me in explaining Piagetian development to parents and/or administrators.

yes no

9. Using LEA in my classroom seems managable to me after reading this manual.

yes no

Please circle the category that applies to you.

1. Ages of children that I teach: 2-3 5-6
3-4 6-7
4-5 7-8
Other (Please list)_____

2. My age: 18-21 35-45
22-28 over 46
29-34

3. I teach in a (private school) (public school).

4. The extent of my education in early childhood education:
some training (community college)
CDA Credential
bachelor's degree
master's degree
doctorate

5. The portion of the country that I live in is the:
East Central
South West

6. I remember learning about LEA during my teacher training.
yes - no

7. My name is: _____

My address is:

SUGGESTIONS, COMMENTS, OR CONCERNS: Please share any insights about specific improvements or changes that may have occured to you while you were testing this manual. (Use the other side, if necessary)

APPENDIX D

MANUAL USERS' COMMENTS

COMMENTS FROM FIELD TESTERS

"The background information on Piaget and learning was excellent! It was clear, understandable and "down to earth". The set-up of the book was very good--it flowed. I liked the bibliographies (annotated). Wonderful idea! I found that the ideas in the follow-up and reinforcing in F week were redundant in median."

"I found the use of the tape recorder and individualized sentences an excellent idea."

"I think this Manual and the work you have done is fabulous. Thanks a lot. It (early reading) has made more sense to me after reading your manual."

"I really enjoyed the use of contriving experiences!"

"I did not feel that the ideas in this book were at all original. Many lessons presented here I have used before ever reading this book and have seen being used in nursery schools all over. Examples of these are: choosing a letter of the week and incorporating all subject areas with that letter."

"I liked the LEA continuum and the parent section. The school district I'm in will be implementing a Language Development Program for Grades 1, 2, 3. I feel this handbook may be helpful in determining curriculum, lessons, and management procedures. Would it be possible to obtain several copies? If this handbook is used some 7500 to 9000 students' education may be impacted."

"Since the experience approach is one which I have used in the classroom consistently, we were pleased to participate in your program. The manual is very explicit and would be a great aid to anyone unfamiliar with the approach."

"Very nicely presented--professional and easily read."

"I tried your program as a student teacher at (a university laboratory school). It was used as part of a unit, therefore, I had to accommodate to the criteria for the unit and for the laboratory school setting. I used your idea of stories that began with a letter and extended that into songs, fingerplays, snacks and art activities. The area of experience charts was used whenever I could do it with an activity (most likely 3 times a week). The children <u>really</u> loved that! They liked seeing their names and showing their parents what they did the day before."